



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Address by Vuk Drašković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 11, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Minister Draskovic, for once again addressing the Permanent Council. The United States appreciates the momentous issues Serbia and Montenegro is currently facing, particularly with respect to the future of the State Union and the future status of Kosovo. We therefore welcome this opportunity to hear your views and concerns -- and to express a few of our own.

Regarding the May 21 referendum, we continue to encourage all parties to observe strictly the referendum modalities negotiated by EU envoy Lajcak, and to work for a campaign and vote that are free, fair, and transparent.

To help support a credible process, ODIHR has already deployed 29 long-term observers and experts to Montenegro and will deploy, by May 17th, 386 short-term observers. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly plans to send another 64 observers. We understand the European Parliament and Council of Europe will also deploy observers. The United States will have a local observer team in place, and Montenegrin civil society groups reportedly are also planning to field hundreds of local observers. This is a truly impressive commitment given Montenegro's population of slightly more than 600,000.

In implementing the outcome of the referendum, political leaders will need to demonstrate wisdom and restraint, and engage in a good-faith dialogue during the post-referendum period. Mr. Minister, we look to Montenegro and Serbia to work to strengthen the relationship between the republics regardless of the referendum outcome.

Regarding the future status talks for Kosovo, the United States continues to work closely with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari, as well as his fine staff to complete the status process this year. These negotiations must continue to move forward. Their conclusion this year is vital for investment and economic development, the return of internally-displaced persons, and the stability of the entire region.

The outcome of the status process must be a multi-ethnic Kosovo that respects human and minority rights. We are particularly interested in the decentralization of local governance, although we will not support arrangements that are non-functional or result in ethnic partition. Serb and other minorities in Kosovo have an essential role to play in this process and it is therefore important that Belgrade support immediately Kosovo Serb participation in local institutions.

Mr. Minister, Serbia and Montenegro is key to stability in the region. We look to Belgrade to engage constructively in the Kosovo status negotiations and to avoid taking actions intended to heighten concerns in Kosovo's minority communities or increase anxiety there. We are troubled by recent behavior that seems to undermine these goals. In particular, the recent attempt by Serbia's Kosovo Coordination Center to force Serbs in Kosovo to choose between receiving salaries from the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government or the Government of Serbia is a matter of serious concern. Cutting off Kosovo-based salaries and prohibiting Kosovar Serbs from participating in Kosovar governing structures makes sustaining Serbian communities in Kosovo more difficult.

Regardless of the status outcome for Kosovo, the need for a continuing international presence in Kosovo is clear. KFOR will remain. The United States will participate in a new civilian mission, which will supervise the implementation of the status settlement. We also recognize the need, as we have said numerous times before in the Permanent Council, for the OSCE to continue, and even possibly expand, its capacity-building and monitoring role in Kosovo once a status agreement is reached. We are ready to support within this Organization any steps necessary to fulfill the role outlined for the OSCE in the negotiation process.

We agree that southern Serbia will remain a challenging issue requiring attention from the Government of Serbia in the months ahead. We remain committed to maintaining good inter-ethnic relations in the region. To that end, we encourage the Government of Serbia to ensure continued funding for the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedje from Serbian ministries.

Mr. Minister, the United States continues to believe Serbia and Montenegro's ultimate future lies in integration with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions and full membership in the family of Western democracies.

Unfortunately, Serbia's path to Euro-Atlantic integration cannot be cleared until Serbia cooperates fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. We applauded your call on May 6 for Ratko Mladic's immediate arrest. As a friend of Serbia and Montenegro, we once again urge delivery of Ratko Mladic to The Hague without further delay.

Once again, thank you for meeting with us here today.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.